

CLINTON HILL NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL  
Newark N.J.

STATEMENT TO BOARD OF EDUCATION - OCTOBER 25, 1960

Dr. Kennelly, Mr. Fuchs and members of the Board, My name is Mrs. Willa May McKenzie of 136 Hillside Ave. I am here in behalf of the Education Committee of the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council.

At its last meeting the Board approved a long-delayed recommendation by the Supt. of Schools that a new elementary school be constructed to relieve the overcrowding at Bergen St. School; that 6 classrooms be added to Madison Avenue School, and that auditoriums and cafeterias be added to both Avon Avenue and Bergen St. Schools. The Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council wishes to express its deep satisfaction over the Board's prompt action upon the Supt.'s recommendations. There is no doubt that the Board members have at heart the needs of our school children, in so acting. But many questions still remain unanswered, and we hope that the Board and the Supt. will come up with answers to them.

Usually five years passes before a recommendation and the opening of a school. Obviously, the large range plan offers no immediate help for the overcrowding that exists today. Without recommendations on the immediate situation, the construction plans offer a deferred partial solution. We urge the Board to request, if no immediate plans are submitted, that they be drawn up. We endorse the suggestions made by Dr. Lewis and Mr. Fuchs at the last meeting that the Supt. submit such plans. Further we ask that concrete proposals be submitted on site, cost, size and design for the new school as well as a timetable for all the proposed construction. We cannot see why, with other types of construction being speedily conducted, an elementary school cannot get special attention.

We also noted the Supt.'s reluctance to make any recommendation for Avon Ave. School pending further information on the clearance for Industrial Urban Renewal in that Area. However, in our estimation some relief for the 16 split-session classes at Avon will have to be found, regardless of the information he obtains. We therefore recommend that additional classrooms be constructed along with the cafeteria and auditorium. There is a special situation, and the old "business as usual" timetable no longer fits. Until these concrete plans are prepared and submitted, the Board's action of the last meeting, welcome as it was, remains incomplete.

We hope, finally, that for a change a positive and original approach to school planning will be shown by the Supt. and his staff. We see evidences of it in New York City and other towns. Why cannot we also see it in Newark? It took no profound surveys to see the direction of population movement in this city five years ago. Yet as recently as a year ago one of the Assistant Superintendents was denying that it would be of any consequence, that it would be a permanent thing. When a child is short-changed in schooling, even a one-month arrangement is too long to endure. Split-session classes, a direct outcome of this lack of planning, seem to be on the increase, rather than the reverse. We think that something is wrong if a school administration cannot see beyond the end of its nose and plan ahead to see that decent standards are maintained. For example, anyone can foresee that enrollment is on the rise at Clinton Place J.H. School; the question is are measures being taken now to avoid split-sessions at the Junior High in a year or so? The fact is that population in Clinton Hill has increased almost one-third in the past decade, despite a 10% drop throughout the city. A door-to-door survey made over a 12-month period by a local church revealed that where 30,000 people lived in 160 city blocks a year ago, 30,000 now live

in 60 blocks and about 14000 in the remainder. A much more creative, far-sighted approach to this whole question of population mobility and urban renewal must be taken by the Supt. and his staff if the situation is not to become even more desperate. There must be far better coordination among the responsible municipal agencies, all of whose policies affect schooling and housing, than there has been till now. We urge this Board to establish a policy, or strengthen the existing one, in this respect.

In summary, we urge 1) immediate plans to relieve growing congestion and end split-sessions in Madison, Bergen, Avon and neighboring schools; 2) immediate proposals on the new elementary school under a stepped-up emergency timetable; 3) that additional classrooms be constructed at Avon Ave. School along with the Auditorium and cafeteria; 4) the construction of mobile classrooms which may be used throughout the city wherever and whenever the need for them is greatest; and 5) the temporary use of churches, temples, or any other brick buildings which can be bought or rented as classroom space to relieve the situation this term and next term until the necessary construction is complete. In this way, the school authorities will uphold their obligation to the children of the city.